

Olaf DG calls for 'better protection' for whistleblowers



By Martin Banks - 27th March 2012

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Giovanni Kessler

The director general of Olaf, the EU's anti-fraud agency, has demanded better legal protection for people who "blow the whistle" on wrongdoing in the institutions.

Speaking in parliament on Tuesday, Giovanni Kessler said whistleblowers were important as they were the "eyes and ears" on irregularities in the EU institutions, including parliament and the commission.

But he said that, at present, legal protection for employees who report cases of fraud or corruption was inadequate, saying they needed to be "protected" from "retaliation".

He added, "There is some protection with the staff regulations, but it needs to be improved."

He also said the EU institutions themselves, including parliament, needed to "feel the same obligation" as whistleblowers to both highlight and investigate internal offending.

The Italian said, "At present, this is not always the case."

Kessler, who was speaking at the opening of a photographic exhibition in parliament on whistleblowing, described people who report offences within the EU as "heroes".

But he added, "In an ideal world, what they do would not be regarded as heroic."

His comments were endorsed by Danish GUE member Søren Søndergaard, who organised the exhibition in conjunction with the Whistleblowing Network and also called for better legal protection for whistleblowers.

He said, "Whistleblowers are not only necessary but indispensable. Without them it would be all too easy for the forces of darkness to play their game."

"The name of the exhibition is 'shining a light on the dark' and that is what whistleblowing is about.

"It could be an engineer in a construction firm giving information about how breaking security standards could lead to weaker concrete used in a building, a bridge or nuclear power plant.

"It could be a soldier giving information about the use of torture or other breaches of the rules of war. But it could also be a civil servant in an EU institution giving information about misuse of the taxpayers' money, corruption or even organised criminality in order to influence political decisions on, for example, financial regulations or banks."

He added, "When you look at the stories you might ask the question: do we do enough to protect the whistleblowers. If we don't it will mean that fewer people dare to come forward to tell what they know and that wrongdoing stays in the dark."